

**Deerfield, IL** - Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) launched his "Tenth District Laureates Program" Saturday by taking 24 seventh grade students to the Adler Planetarium. Backed by the teachers and experts of his Education Advisory Board, Kirk started the "Laureates Program" to provide highly-focused education opportunities to seventh grade gifted students in the Tenth District. Twelve middle schools in the district were selected through a lottery to participate in the program with one boy and one girl being selected from each school.

"As one of the ten best educated districts in the country, our communities are home to many gifted students," said Kirk. With cuts being made in "gifted education" programs, it is important that we develop innovative programs outside the classroom that can challenge gifted children in our communities."

The Adler Planetarium arranged for the Laureates a video conference with a group of scientists from Chile, demonstrating ongoing research in the Atacama Desert. The Atacama Desert is the most arid region on Earth where living organisms were discovered surviving on sunlight and fog despite the harsh environment. The students also received behind-the-scenes access to many features of the Adler Planetarium which are not accessible to the average Planetarium customer.

"After three years of work raising standards for poorly-performing students, we must also address the needs of our gifted students by challenging them in various ways outside the classroom," said Kirk. "I want to thank the Adler Planetarium for providing opportunities for these students to learn from their scientists and I look forward to future endeavors to Chicago's top academic and cultural institutions with the students of the "Tenth District Laureates Program."

Classes in the coming weeks will be held with scientists at the Field Museum and engineers at the "Starbase Atlantis" program run by the Great Lakes Naval Training Center.